

MEA's A+ Agenda – Action, Accountability and Achievement

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning on issues that are crucial to all of us.

Lately, whether the discussion in Lansing is around school funding, education reforms or what lies ahead for Michigan, education is taking center stage—and that's as it should be.

MEA intends to be a part of those discussions. We've begun by offering a bold reform agenda that will help make Michigan a leader in public education through real, balanced solutions to the issues facing our state.

We thank Gov. Snyder for the opportunity he gave us to share our plan with him. We're encouraged by his interest in working together and we hope for more conversations with him in the future.

MEA's A+ Agenda, which you have before you, addresses five areas in need of attention by Lansing lawmakers. Briefly, let me go over those areas with you.

MEA recommends:

1. The realignment of our PreK-12 education system to support students so they can graduate high school ready to succeed in college or other post-secondary opportunities.
2. Increase accountability for everyone in public education—teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents.
3. Increase efficiency for all school districts to get the greatest return on investment in students, communities and the economy.
4. Ensure good stewardship of taxpayer dollars by increasing school district financial stability and accountability.
5. Fix Michigan's antiquated tax structure that has led to a decade-long budget crisis.

In my testimony today, I'd like to highlight three key topics—accountability, efficiency and stability.

First of all, MEA believes that the overall educational success of Michigan's students depends on everyone in public education being held accountable—not just teachers. That's why any thought of completely eliminating teacher tenure is not true education reform.

Tenure itself is not the problem; the tenure **PROCESS** is what needs attention.

MEA supports streamlining the tenure process to reduce the time and expense involved in discharging ineffective tenured teachers. MEA has never supported the idea of keeping ineffective teachers. That doesn't serve students.

But "ineffectiveness" must be addressed through the use of fair, impartial processes and standards. That requires locally negotiated evaluation systems that are based on multiple measures—not just standardized test scores.

Local school districts, in concert with their employees, need to be making the decision about what the evaluation system will look like. They know what works best for them in their school district. The "Michigan Framework for Teacher Evaluations," which has been endorsed by the Michigan Department of Education, is a good example of such an evaluation system.

But we're not just talking about accountability for teachers.

Administrators are the academic leaders of our schools. They are charged with improving educational practices and ensuring student success. As such, they must be trained annually in the district's negotiated evaluation procedures if they're going to bear the responsibility for making sure students have the best teachers.

And, to ensure all employees receive high-quality feedback, administrators must be held accountable for completing the evaluations annually, as required by law. That feedback needs to be supported by district-provided professional development opportunities that relate to an employee's job skills and their role in supporting student learning.

Everyone in education must shoulder the responsibility for making sure Michigan students graduate ready for the future.

MEA's A+ Agenda also considers the need for efficient school districts that provide a return on investments for students, communities, taxpayers and the economy.

Consolidation can meet that need but there must be a more consistent and streamlined process to consolidating school districts and services.

For effective, cost-efficient school district consolidation, voter approval should be required before any consolidation is decided. And adequate time and structure to create the new district is necessary.

MEA supports consolidation plans that strive to preserve employees' jobs because those employees are part of the community and help keep the local economy going.

No service consolidation or outsourcing of services should be done without a thorough, independent, cost-benefit analysis. And before any employee jobs are sacrificed, administrative consolidation should first be considered. That's where the greatest savings are with the least amount of impact to student services.

ISDs should not be exempt from consolidation. Greater efficiency and accountability can be met by consolidating administrative functions; by making sure tax dollars are either spent at the ISD or distributed to school districts; and by holding popular elections for ISD boards of education.

Taxpayer dollars support our school districts and taxpayers should feel confident that their money is being put to good use. That's why MEA's A+ Agenda supports increasing school districts' financial stability and accountability.

One measure we believe can help is making sure school districts spend at least 85 percent of their resources on direct student support—services that directly benefit students. This includes classroom teaching, counseling and social work, student transportation, student nutrition, and student facility maintenance and sanitation. We've provided you with the specific breakdown on these expenses by school district.

In Michigan, the average percentage of expenditures for direct student support is 78 percent. That figure is based on information school districts have submitted to the Department of Education and the Center for Education Performance and Information.

Fully utilizing school resources is a key to student improvement and success. Most K-12 school districts are already meeting—or close to meeting—the 85 percent measure MEA proposes. What the average percentage indicates is that some school districts are spending more money than necessary on such things as administrative costs, business service costs, inappropriate capital outlay expenditures from the general fund budget, or excessive costs related to supplies and materials.

This becomes an issue of resource allocation and priorities. One way to address the issue may be consolidation. As stated in our A+ Agenda, MEA can support the consolidation of school districts and school services, as long as attention is given to the process and safeguards I mentioned earlier.

What's more critical for student success—running a school strictly as a business or making sure students are given all the resources they need so they can succeed in college or other post-secondary opportunities?

I think we know the answer to that.

If we are truly about the business of providing a quality education and safeguarding Michigan's economic future, then I ask you to give serious consideration to MEA's A+ Agenda. MEA stands ready to work with Gov. Snyder and you, lawmakers from both parties, to enact these changes.

School employees have been sacrificing and sharing in our state's pain for years.

We are on the front lines of this economic crisis—and we want to help.

Call on us.

We want to be part of the solution to Michigan's problems.

Thank you.

Out of respect for your time today, my presentation has been brief. But, I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.